

TESTIMONY OF PEDRO MANGUE

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

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My name is Pedro Mangué, and I am a torture survivor from Equatorial Guinea. I am grateful to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for allowing me to speak with you today about Equatorial Guinea, what my government did to me and how I hope you can use the power of the United States Congress to communicate my message to Teodoro Obiang, who has been the dictator for 35 years.

Many of you may not know very much about my country, it was once colonized by Spain and borders Cameroon and Gabon in West Africa. It is the only African country where Spanish is the major official language. Equatorial Guinea is the smallest state in continental Africa, with a per capita income of \$22,300 a year, the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. This income comes from oil, several major American oil companies including ExxonMobil, Chevron and Marathon, which just bought Hess, operate there.

Because of all the oil, gold, timber and other resources, Obiang and his extended family are very rich. But almost everyone else is extremely poor Obiang steals all the oil money. Most people do not even have drinking water. Equatorial Guinea has one of the worst human rights records in Africa. Government agents arrest people for complaining that there are not enough jobs. The president is from the Fang ethnic group, so am I. But people from other five ethnic groups suffer even more.

Here is my story. When I was a child, my father got a job working for an oil company in Gabon, so our family moved there. After he died, we moved to Cameroon, my mother's country. I attended high school there became totally fluent in French, the major language of Cameroon. I also spoke some English.

My mother died when I was in high school so when I was 18, I decided to move back to Equatorial Guinea, my father's country. I brought two important documents with me – my birth certificate and my baptismal card to prove I was born in Equatorial Guinea. But the police refused to give me a National Identification Card.

In Equatorial Guinea, you need a national identification card for everything—to work, to even walk in public because police can stop you on the street at any time and demand to see your national identification card. If you don't have one, they can just lock you up in jail and make you pay a huge fine.

I got thrown in jail and was accused of being a foreign spy. I did absolutely nothing illegal and I was not involved in any political activity. They put me in a tiny room with more than

100 other people with no space to sleep, or sit down or move my body at all. They kept shouting at me “You are not a Guinean, you are from Cameroon, you are a spy.”

In 2001, I went to university in Nigeria to study applied chemistry Nigeria. Every time I returned home for vacation, I got locked up again. The government suspected any Equatoguinean who studied in Nigeria was part of the opposition. But I was not in any political party, I was just a student studying chemistry. Between 2001 and 2011, I got locked up a total of 23 times.

I returned to Equatorial Guinea after I graduated and got a job with ExxonMobil as an engineer. Security forces came to my house and took me away in a police car. In 2008 I spent 4 months in the Malabo Central police station and the notorious Black Beach. I was cut with a knife many times on my back and abdomen, repeatedly beaten and stabbed through both calves and suspended from the ceiling with my body bent over an iron bar.

They tortured me for 4 months, day and night. Police came into my cell at night. It was a dark, dirty cell with more than a hundred other prisoners, almost all political prisoners. They would call my name, drag me into a separate room, beat me with batons and guns. They would kick me and demand that I give them names of people in the opposition. I kept saying I didn’t know anyone, I was just an engineer. My right ankle is permanently deformed from the torture, and it hurts all the time whenever I walk.

Finally my family and friends raised more than \$2,000 and I was released from prison. Two years later I left Equatorial Guinea for Cameroon and then arrived at Dulles Airport in Virginia in January 2011. I requested political asylum, but the Department of Homeland Security transferred me to the Rappahannock detention facility in Virginia. I was locked up for more than two months with no public shower, no books, strange food, and not even an hour of recreation. It was so traumatic, it brought back memories of prison in Equatorial Guinea. The way they treated me was a civilized kind of torture. After getting out of detention, my lawyer referred me to TASSC.

TASSC calmed down my trauma, helped me with transportation and clothing and made me feel at home. TASSC helps survivors to heal. TASSC interns even accompanied me to court when I had my asylum hearing. In July 2011 I was granted political asylum.

Today I live in Washington DC, I am married with two children and work as a security guard. But my friends and family in Equatorial Guinea say the situation is horrible, and getting worse. That is because the president’s son is the Minister of Defense. He is sending police to arrest and torture people even if they complain about the lack of water or electricity. The government is also arresting foreigners who try to enter the country, shooting them and throwing them into the ocean.

The U.S. Department of State names three major issues in America's relationship with Equatorial Guinea. First is good governance and democracy, second is human rights, and third is U.S. national security and access to energy resources. I would like the United States to do more about the lack of democracy and human rights.

- First, we need freedom of speech and democracy in Equatorial Guinea .
- Torture must end and the horrible conditions in the prisons must change.
- There have to be equal rights and justice for all Equatoguineans, no matter what ethnic group they are from.
- The economic wealth of the country only reaches the President's clan. The wealth has to go everyone in the country.

A first step for Members of Congress and the Obama Administration can take to improve human rights in Equatorial Guinea is to allow the establishment of a strong non-governmental human rights group. I hope that Congress will support this idea so torture will end in my country.

Thank you very much for listening to my testimony today.